UEAPME (ed.)

European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET

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QA HiVETnet

Legal notice

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Preface

An increasing number of people today acquire **qualifications in the field of higher education**. This is a truly positive development since, after all, the economic success of companies depends largely on their staff's knowledge and skills. Despite this educational expansion, many EU Member States are recording in some cases very **high unemployment rates**, also among young people with an academic qualification. At the same time, many companies in the EU are complaining about **skilled labour shortage** and about job applicants frequently **not having suitable qualifications**. Small and medium-sized enterprises in particular are facing these challenges. They often lack the time, staff and financial resources to implement time-consuming and costly recruitment processes or to train staff according to their needs.

To tackle these challenges efficiently, education and training programmes need to be geared more strongly towards the specific qualification demand of companies. Therefore the European Commission has, for many years, been demanding and supporting **the strengthening of vocational education and training (VET)** in the Member States. This goal gained particular momentum with the Copenhagen process, which was initiated in 2001/2002. As part of this process, measures and objectives were defined to enhance the **transparency, recognition** and **quality of VET qualifications**. UEAPME, the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, has actively supported and contributed to this process from the start, especially because the results of this process are of major importance for the total of around twenty million small and medium-sized companies in Europe.

As a result of this process, many Member States have started **reforming their VET systems**. But so far the measures taken in this connection have primarily focused on **initial vocational education and training (IVET)**. Many states are attempting to establish company-based training programmes or to integrate work-based learning in the school-based IVET sector. These are, without any doubt, steps in the right direction. The reform efforts in the Member States should however not be restricted to IVET. Particularly due to continually increasing requirements made by the labour market in terms of qualifications, more attention also needs to be paid to **higher VET**, i.e. the further or higher qualification of graduates of an IVET programme. But the discourse on the topic of higher qualifications is almost exclusively limited to tertiary academic education. This is a limited view because knowledge- and innovation-driven economies need not only higher education graduates but also highly qualified, skilled workers in their respective profession.

Higher VET is an extremely **heterogeneous** sector in Europe. Whereas tertiary academic qualifications follow a uniform structure (bachelor, masters, PhD) and have common quality standards, higher VET lacks these **shared elements**. This has the result or is the reason that there is no shared understanding of how higher VET must be understood in either the EU or in the majority of European countries. As a result of the lack of a uniform '**umbrella brand**', this sector is considered less important in public perception than tertiary academic education and its qualifications are often less familiar. Therefore, in order to create a higher level of awareness of the significance of higher VET, greater **understanding** and **clarity** is

needed about what characteristics this sector has and which **joint features** there are. Such a joint feature is **quality assurance**.

This is precisely the intention of the **European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET**, which were created on the initiative of UEAPME: the key **quality features** described in this publication are aimed at contributing – in a manner understandable to the outside world – to the presentation of what **characterises** higher VET programmes and qualifications, how they **distinguish themselves**, and which quality aspects are **connected** with them. This should foster the creation of **common understanding** of higher VET.

The guidelines additionally aim to serve as orientation for the stakeholders in higher VET, showing how they can **improve** their qualification offer if necessary. In addition, they aim to provide impetus towards closer cooperation between these actors at the national and European level.

To promote EU-wide cooperation more strongly, a **European Network on Quality Assurance in Higher Vocational Education and Training** has additionally been set up on the initiative of UEAPME. This network aims to create a higher level of awareness of the importance of this sector and its quality assurance, as well as to further develop the Guidelines.

The organisations which were **actively involved** in drawing up the European Guidelines are key members of this network. UEAPME would like to thank these organisations very much for their work so far! At this point, UEAPME would also like to extend its most cordial thanks to the **European Commission**, which co-funded this publication. We hope that many readers will find the Guidelines useful and informative.

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UEAPME President

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1. Introduction

The initial and continuing education and training systems in Europe are currently facing **huge challenges**. Globalisation, demographic change, technological progress and rapidly progressing digitalisation are transforming the world of work and thus also the requirements on education. Due to these developments, the number of jobs with a low requirement profile has been declining for some years, while demand for highly qualified skilled labour is continually rising. Based on a Cedefop projection[1] a high qualification level will be required for 46% of the jobs in the European Union by 2025. The share of jobs with a low qualification level, by contrast, will drop to 13%.

Another challenge is the high **youth unemployment** in many EU Member States. This is not only a consequence of the financial and economic crisis but is also due to education and qualification systems which do not take the specific qualification needs of companies sufficiently into account.

Lack of qualified staff puts the companies' competitiveness at risk

Many young Europeans lack relevant professional qualifications and work experience when they enter the labour market. This has serious consequences for individuals and companies alike: frequently young people **cannot hold any (highly) qualified positions** because they do not meet the required preconditions. For the companies, in turn, the lack of qualification of their staff has **negative effects** on their **competitiveness**[2]. For this reason, in recent years the political focus has increasingly shifted to practice-oriented VET systems which provide needs-oriented qualifications for companies, thus facilitating a smooth transition from education to the labour market for young people.

Promotion of high-quality VET in Europe

With the launch of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, a platform which brings together national governments with businesses, social partners, chambers and VET providers[3], as well as other initiatives to promote practice-oriented VET, such as the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)[4], **first steps** into the right direction have already been made by the European Commission. Successful **practice-oriented VET programmes**, such as dual training programmes, are meanwhile considered efficient instruments to increase the employability of young people and have therefore become a key part of European VET policy[5]. The European social partners explicitly support this process and have committed themselves to cooper-

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[1] Cf. http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5526 (retrieved on 4.4.2017).
[2] Cf. Joint Declaration of the German, Luxembourg and Austrian chambers of industry, trade, crafts and the economy and of the Swiss Trade Association on the significance of tertiary vocational education and training in Europe. Unpublished document. 2014.
[3] Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147 (retrieved on 4.4.2017).
[4] Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176 (retrieved on 4.4.2017).
[5] Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf (retrieved on 4.4.2017).

ating in strengthening the quality and relevance of qualifications and education systems at all levels in order to address skills mismatches[6].

Current European initiatives to promote VET mainly focus on IVET, however. To date, the aspect of lifelong learning has not been taken into account at all or not sufficiently considered. As a consequence, a **second step** must now be taken to **strengthen and further develop higher VET** as well. Although this step had already been announced in the Bruges Communiqué in December 2010[7], hardly any concrete initiatives have to date been launched at European level. But it would after all be necessary to establish higher VET as a supplement that is equivalent to tertiary academic education. Because in many sectors and companies, holders of higher VET qualifications form the productive backbone and thus play a key role in the transfer of research findings to marketable products and services.

Higher VET – qualifications 'from the economy, for the economy'

Higher VET is usually considered to be a part of continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and often builds on initial VET qualifications. This is regulated differently in the EU Member States. Learners in the higher VET sector deepen their previously acquired competences and/or expand them for their entrepreneurial career, for company management tasks and for other key positions within a company. At the foreground of the learning process lies the acquisition of **professional competence** at the highest level. The main point of reference for higher VET is therefore the respective profession or field of work rather than the academic discipline, which is critical for tertiary academic education.

Higher VET qualifications are allocated to those levels of national qualifications frameworks (NQF) which are referenced to the **levels 5 to 8 of the European Qualifications Framework** (EQF). They pursue the following **three core objectives**:

1. to meet the companies' demand for qualifications
2. to secure the individuals' employability
3. to acquire and further develop management and leadership skills, particularly with a view to founding a new company as well

The main reason why higher VET qualifications meet the specific needs of the labour market is that their development and implementation have usually been **controlled** or **significantly conducted** by **institutions that are close to the business sphere**, such as chambers and professional associations, and that **professional practitioners** play a key role in this process. This guarantees that the qualifications meet the needs of the companies. Higher VET qualifications are therefore always **qualifications 'from the economy, for the economy'**.

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[6] Cf. http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/201306_Framework_of_Actions_Youth_Employment_final.pdf (retrieved on 4.4.2017).

[7] http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf (retrieved on 01.04.2017).

Benefits for companies

Due to the dynamic of technological developments and the associated increasing complexity of companies' work and business processes, higher VET fulfils an important knowledge and technology transfer function for companies. This is because small and medium-sized companies, in particular, do not usually have their own HR or even research department. Therefore they benefit especially from the needs-based and practice-oriented qualification concepts of higher VET, forming the basis for skilled workers to be able to acquire necessary advanced skills and, in this way, to secure the companies' success for the long term. This means that the qualifications provided enable the companies to carry out needs-oriented HR development independently.

Promoting awareness of higher VET

Higher VET qualifications, such as the master craftsperson qualification, play a **major role** in the education systems and on the labour markets of some European countries. This applies especially to countries where companies are also important places of learning for IVET and CVET.

But many countries lack awareness of the specific benefits of higher VET. This is due to two factors: on the one hand, vocational education and training is restricted to the IVET sector in many EU Member States; as a rule, advanced qualifications can exclusively be acquired by attending tertiary study programmes there. On the other hand, higher VET has a **very heterogeneous** structure. This leads to lack of transparency and insufficient awareness of the qualifications acquired in this sector[8].

It has come to light in the course of the development and implementation of NQF in many Member States that higher VET qualifications are often allocated to lower levels than academic degrees and therefore tend to be underrated. Here, the goal of the learning outcome approach, which is used in the qualifications frameworks to describe and classify qualifications, is specifically to contribute to creating **equivalence** in principle between **vocational education and training** on the one hand and **academic education** on the other. Currently, academic qualifications are rated more highly than qualifications acquired in the VET sector. This is particularly connected with the fact that higher education establishments enjoy a good reputation among the public and that this is also reflected in the qualifications acquired there. Another reason is the higher degree of standardisation in the academic sphere with its common qualification structure (bachelor-masters-PhD) and the jointly defined quality standards.

In order to enhance the reputation and appreciation of vocational qualifications, it is important to improve **understanding of higher VET**. The goal of the description of approaches towards **quality assurance** that are essential in this sector is to uncover the features which are typical of higher VET and show the logic it pursues.

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[8] Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7893&type=2&furtherPubs=yes (retrieved on 4.4.2017).

In this connection, its **governance** logic, which distinguishes higher VET significantly from academic education, plays a major role. As already mentioned above, higher VET is governed by professional organisations such as chambers and associations. Representatives of these organisations therefore play a decisive role in the regulatory work, the learning and examination processes. Accordingly, higher VET programmes meet the specific needs of the companies. Qualifications in the field of tertiary academic education, however, are developed by the university institutions themselves. Although this can also involve a coordination process with the economy, it is always indirect and within the framework of or based on the ideas of the academic staff.

Objectives and target groups of the European Guidelines

The goal of the **European Guidelines**, which have been drawn up by subject experts following an analysis of quality assurance systems in selected countries and many expert talks, is to present **uniformly defined quality features (QFs)** which characterise higher VET. In this way, it will be made transparent what education and training programmes and qualifications in this sector **are based on** and what learners as well as employers can **expect** from these qualifications. The quality features can serve as guidance for actors in the higher VET sector regarding **improvement** of relevant qualification programmes where necessary. Overall, this publication aims to encourage a higher degree of transparency and better **comparability of higher VET**.

2. Quality assurance in higher VET

What is quality assurance?

The term **quality** refers to the 'nature' – i.e. properties, criteria or attributes – of a product, a service, a process, etc. which makes it suited for a certain purpose or for **achieving specific goals**[9]. The assessment of quality aims to ascertain whether and, if so, what differences there are between the targeted and the actual quality-determining features. Quality assurance builds on these findings and, by means of systematic analysis, uncovers the causes of these discrepancies with the objective of removing quality deficits and/or avoiding them in the future.

The topics of quality and quality assurance have been playing a vital role in education for some years. The goal is to shape the 'nature' of the entire qualification process in a way that the **educational objectives** specified by the qualification provider are reached.

For **higher VET**, three core objectives have been defined which, along with the specific learning objectives applying to all qualifications provided, are pursued with varying intensity. These are, as already mentioned,

1. to meet the companies' demand for qualifications
2. to secure the individuals' employability
3. to acquire and further develop management and leadership skills, particularly with a view to founding a new company as well

Before elaborating on the specifics of quality assurance in higher VET, it will be explained how 'higher VET' is understood in this publication.

What is higher VET?

The term **'higher VET'** was only introduced a short time ago in the educational policy discourse at European level and at the level of the Member States. Before that, the main distinction made was between initial and continuing vocational education and training (IVET, CVET) as well as higher (academic) education. In the course of the development and implementation of the national qualifications frameworks (NQF) in the EU Member States, higher VET qualifications – above all those acquired outside the higher education (HE) sector – increasingly moved into the centre of interest. The reasons are, on the one hand, increased interest in company- or work-based qualification programmes and, on the other, the lack of information on these programmes and qualifications that has been prevalent to date. But to appropriately assess these qualifications for the purpose of an NQF allocation, it is necessary for them to be presented in a transparent manner.

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[9]   Cf. http://www.eqavet.eu/qa/gns/glossary/q/quality.aspx (retrieved on 4.4.2017).

To date there is no common understanding in Europe on which qualifications belong to higher VET and what, quite generally, is understood by this term[10]. The European Guidelines **define higher VET** as follows:

- Higher VET qualifications are allocated to those NQF levels which are referenced to the **EQF levels 5 to 8**.
- These qualifications are usually acquired **outside the higher education sector** and therefore also outside the Bologna system.
- Higher VET is consistently **demand-driven**. Critical are the specific qualification needs of the companies providing the impetus for developing new or adapting existing qualifications.
- The higher VET sector is characterised by a **governance structure with close ties to the economy**. Professional and business associations as well as chambers and social partners are the driving and controlling forces behind the development and implementation of qualifications and therefore the guarantee for proximity to the labour market and demand orientation.
- Higher VET is characterised by the direct **involvement of professional practitioners** from the companies, who contribute their expertise throughout the entire 'lifecycle' – from the development and implementation of a qualification up to its evaluation.
- Higher VET makes it possible to provide tailor-made **further and higher qualification** for people who, as a rule, already have a relevant IVET qualification and/or several years of experience in company-based practice, with different regulations applying in the national systems.
- At the foreground of the qualifications provided in higher VET are **practical work** and **experience-based learning**, supported or complemented by the theoretical knowledge required for action competence.
- One major focus when providing qualifications in higher VET is to **deepen and/or expand specialist competence**, thus enabling graduates to perform complex tasks, including in combination with unforeseeable situations at work which prompt certain actions, at their own responsibility, or to coordinate the performance of these tasks.
- Graduates in higher VET additionally acquire **managerial skills** which enable them to **lead** project teams, fields of work or organisational units as well as to **set up** companies. In addition, they are able to assume **responsibility for staff** and often to carry out the **company-based training** of junior employees as well.
- The provision of specialist and managerial competences is complemented practically by the strengthening of key **soft skills** (such as communicative skills, the ability to deal with conflict, enthusiasm, problem-solving ability, creativity, innovation capacity) to further expand the professional competence.
- Qualifications provided in higher VET are not geared specifically towards companies but open up to graduates a **wide activity field in the economy**.

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[10] Cf. the study published in 2016 on behalf of the European Commission which focused on this topic: http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=15572&langId=en (retrieved on 4.8.2016).

Examples of higher VET

The following **examples** from different European countries aim to illustrate the key features of higher VET based on specific qualifications:

France
The master craftsperson qualification, which is allocated to NQF level 3 in France (which corresponds to EQF level 5), requires the previous acquisition of a qualification at level 4 (which corresponds to EQF level 4) – as a rule in the same profession – and participation in a master craftsperson course. Master craftsperson courses are held in the training centres of the chambers of trade. The master craftsperson qualification is mainly aimed at the further development of subject-related knowledge and skills at a high level. Graduates of a master craftsperson training course additionally acquire entrepreneurial competences, including in marketing, economic and financial management plus HR management, to run a company as entrepreneurs or managers. They are additionally able to train apprentices and junior staff. The master craftsperson titles are developed by APCMA at the instigation and with the active cooperation of the respective professional association. The training and the examination process have a modular structure and are continually evaluated and revised in close cooperation with the professional association. Every five years, each master craftsperson title needs to be newly approved as part of the National Qualifications Framework and, in this process, also needs to newly prove its relevance on the labour market.

Austria: Qualification of graduates of the Specialist Academy of the Institute for Economic Promotion (WIFI)
Completion of the Specialist Academy (*Fachakademie*, FA) of the Institutes for Economic Promotion (*Wirtschaftsförderungsinstitute*, WIFI, i.e. the CVET providers of the Austrian Economic Chambers, qualifies holders of relevant VET qualifications in the technical field with several years of professional practice for work as specialist skilled workers, middle-tier executives and for setting up and managing a company. The part-time four-semester programme which needs to be completed to acquire this qualification aims at upskilling, personal development and the acquisition of entrepreneurial competences. The contents, which are geared towards entrepreneurial practice, are laid down in close cooperation with professional practitioners. Overall, companies play a major role at the Specialist Academy: they are involved in decision-making structures as well in operational qualification development, the teaching of contents and the assessment procedure.

Germany: The master craftsperson qualification (*Handwerksmeister/in*)
The 'Meister' qualification enjoys a high relevance for the German labour market as it provides entrepreneurial know-how and technical competences on a high level. Accordingly, the master craftsperson qualification comprises the necessary entrepreneurial skills for managing a company on a self-employed basis or as an executive. In addition, holders of the master craftsperson qualification boast a high degree of specialist knowledge and skills enabling them to position a craft business successfully on the market. Furthermore they are able to train their own apprentices and therefore develop efficient and motivated junior staff. In the German Qualifications Framework (GQF), the master craftsperson qualification has been allocated to Level 6 (which corresponds to Level 6 of the EQF). In Germany, the master craftsperson qualification is classified as upgrading training. One prerequisite for admission is the acquisition of a diploma in a nationwide regulated, dual training occupation. As a rule, candidates for the master craftsperson examination additionally complete a one- to two-year master craftsperson course. These courses are held in the training centres and centres of excellence of the chambers and professional associations of skilled crafts and businesses, among other institutions.

Greece

Post-secondary initial vocational training is provided in Greece by the public/private vocational training institutes (IEK) and is officially recognised at level 5 of the NQF and the EQF Studies last between two and four semesters and cover a great variety of professional sectors, such as: financing and administrative services, health, beauty and social services, information technology/telecommunications, tourism and transport, construction and public works, food and drink, agriculture, etc. According to new legislation, initial vocational training courses are designed in Greece by the Educational Policy Institute, with the active contribution of social partners and chambers, in order to face the current needs of the labour market. The development of the vocational training curricula is based on the relevant occupation profiles and the curricula are officially approved by the Greek Ministry of Education. Most students are high school graduates, aged between 20 and 30, and they study theoretical, practical and combined subjects during their study period. After attendance of the initial vocational training course and successful participation in the relevant validation procedure, the students obtain a Vocational Training Certificate which corresponds to level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework. With the Vocational Training Certificate, IEK graduates are fully entitled to request provision of the relevant professional license. They also have the necessary qualifications and soft skills to perform complex tasks, also in unforeseeable situations, at their own responsibility.

Belgium

The master craftsperson training enables participants to acquire the skills needed to practise a profession. As the name suggests, entrepreneurship training prepares learners to become independent, i.e. to set up their own business. Nevertheless, after graduating as an entrepreneur, the learners will also be able to enhance their acquired knowledge as employees, in a managerial function or as collaborators closely affiliated to an SME. Learners are not obliged to create their own business but the management courses will have prepared them to do so. Entrepreneurship training can be envisaged after an apprenticeship contract or after high school but also as a logical step of professional reorientation. After completion of compulsory education (at the age of 18 years), which is the requirement for enrolment, there is no maximum age for training in such a programme. In principle, the master craftsperson training lasts two years. But for some professions it can last one or three years. A preparatory year may be necessary for some technical professions. This is the case if the learners have no previous practice or knowledge in the field. The objective is to provide the learners with the basic professional, theoretical and practical knowledge to be able to start the courses to train to be a master craftsperson. This Master Craftsperson Diploma is positioned at level 5 of the EQF.

What is quality assurance in higher VET?

The topic of quality in VET has gained momentum with the **Copenhagen process**, which was initiated in 2001/2002 by the European Commission in cooperation with the Member States and the European social partners. This process pursues the goal of strengthening VET in Europe. The Copenhagen Declaration[11] and several subsequent declarations specify that the **promotion of transparency and the recognition of qualifications** as well as **quality assurance in VET** are major priorities.

On 18 June 2009, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Recommendation on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)[12], thus creating a sound basis for further, intensified co-operation in the field of quality assurance. Parallel to this Recommendation, the European Network on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training was initiated, in which 34 European states and the European social partners are now involved. One major goal of EQAVET is to set up a joint, Europe-wide understanding of quality in vocational education and training[13].

The EQAVET reference framework acts as a European reference instrument which aims to support EU Member States in promoting the continual improvement of their VET systems based on common reference indicators[14]. These indicators can be used to draw conclusions with regard to the respective state of the quality level of national VET systems. In addition, EQAVET forms a platform for the Europe-wide exchange of best practice examples. The goal is to promote the quality of VET overall and enhance the transparency of VET programmes and systems in order to foster mutual trust between the different VET actors across the entire system. But EQAVET does not see itself as an EU-wide valid quality assurance system. Rather, EQAVET opens up to the involved actors the necessary scope for national or also sectoral design of quality assurance in the IVET and CVET sectors.

The vast majority of European initiatives and projects on quality assurance in VET have to date been mainly focused on IVET and there in particular on work-based learning. **Quality assurance in higher VET** by contrast has only been a subject of discussions to some degree, probably also because – as mentioned above – this education sector has not been a subject of educational policy discourse at the EU level. The **specifics** of and relevant quality features in **higher VET** need to be examined separately however.

The main **quality features** in higher VET are described in the following chapter. They refer to the **definition of higher VET** on which the European Guidelines are based. The basis for the structured presentation of the quality features is the quality assurance cycle as used in

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[11]   Cf. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf (retrieved on 4.8.2016).
[12]   Cf. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF (retrieved on 4.8.2016).
[13]   Cf. http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/about-eqavet/mission.aspx (retrieved on 1.4.2017).
[14]   Cf. http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/policy-context/european-quality-assurance-reference-framework/indicators.aspx and https://www.deqa-vet.de/_media/PDF_allgemein/TG_Brochure_compass_deutsch.pdf (retrieved on 4.8.2016). About the indicators see also http://www.eqavet.eu/tns/EQAVET-Resources/EQAVET-indicators-improving-the-relevance-of-VET.aspx (retrieved on 3.8.2016).

EQAVET, comprising the **four phases** of planning, implementation, evaluation and review. As well as the indicators mentioned above, this cycle forms another key element of EQAVET[15]. At the same time, the four phases portray the **'lifecycle' of a qualification**, along which the individual quality features are described.

The European Guidelines must be understood as a contribution made as part of the EQAVET process, referring only indirectly to the reference indicators. Rather, a structured and transparent description of the main quality features in higher VET aims to enhance understanding for this education sector in the European context, particularly among representatives of education systems where this type of qualification does not play any, or only a lesser, role. In addition, the Guidelines constitute a certain orientation aid for actors in higher VET in the planning, implementation, evaluation and review of their own qualification programmes.

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[15] Cf. http://www.eqavet.eu/tns/EQAVET-Resources/Working-with-the-EQAVET-Cycle.aspx (retrieved on 4.4.2017).

3. Quality features of higher VET

The following quality features have been compiled based on an analysis of the quality assurance mechanisms of selected reference qualifications in higher VET in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and Greece. The quality features are meant to be understood as **reference points** which stakeholders in higher VET can use to check their own quality assurance systems, mechanisms and instruments and improve them if necessary. But the quality features also aim to show those interested what **characterises programmes and qualifications in higher VET** and how they **distinguish** themselves. This should contribute to more **transparency and comparability**.

The core objectives of higher VET

Higher VET as it is understood in this publication pursues **three core objectives** which are interrelated:

(1) Meet the companies' demand for qualifications

Companies are permanently faced with new challenges brought about by economic, technological and social changes. A company's success in tackling these challenges is highly dependent on the qualifications of its employees. It is only with employees who boast the necessary qualifications to master increasingly complex and changing situations at work that companies can act successfully on the market in the long term. This makes education and training a 'raw material' that is of decisive influence for a company's modernisation and innovation potential and thus its competitiveness. To meet the companies' demand for qualifications in a tailored manner, qualifications need to be offered which are geared towards this demand. Therefore, education and training providers need to impart those qualifications that are in demand with companies now as well as in the future.

(2) Secure the individuals' employability

In a dynamic economy, lifelong learning is indispensable for keeping fit for the labour market. Learning aims to equip the labour force with the tools required to keep pace with a continuously changing labour market. Programmes imparting professional qualifications should therefore be designed to teach learners the specialist competences and soft skills they can use directly at work. This applies especially to qualifications in higher VET, the main focus of which is on the specific applicability in the profession. If they want to make sure this is the case, education and training providers need to know (anticipate) the companies' (future) demand for qualifications and take it appropriately into account in the qualifications offered by them. This guarantees the labour market relevance of a qualification and therefore makes a major contribution towards maintaining and promoting the employability of individuals.

(3) Acquire and further develop management and leadership skills, particularly with a view to founding a new company as well

One major goal of higher VET is to provide qualifications enabling their holders to take on management and leadership functions, both in companies and in a self-employed capacity. From the perspective of its graduates, the higher VET sector thus creates an important basis for career options and key positions in a company as well as for entrepreneurship; from the viewpoint of the overall economy, it contributes towards entrepreneurial success and securing locations in a sustainable manner.

The quality assurance cycle in higher VET

These core objectives of higher VET must be considered throughout the entire 'lifecycle' of a qualification. This corresponds to the quality assurance cycle that is suggested as part of EQARF and consists of **four phases**:

Phase 1 – Planning: This phase comprises the analysis of the qualification needs in companies and their comparison with the qualification programmes currently provided: Which knowledge and skills are demanded/not sufficiently available on the labour market? Which knowledge and skills do (future) employees need in order to remain/become employable? This analysis will be used to derive the competences which – adjusted to existing qualification programmes – should be included in new or modernised qualifications.

Phase 2 – Implementation: This phase is about putting the qualification programmes into reality. It comprises the preparation of a qualification's contents, the specification of the pedagogical and didactic concept and the structure of the assessment or examination procedure. This phase also aims to define the target groups and qualification level, such as access and admission requirements, the NQF level. It also includes additional preparatory work, such as the selection of the qualified educational staff, the selection and training of the examiners, the preparation of learning, working and exam materials, etc.
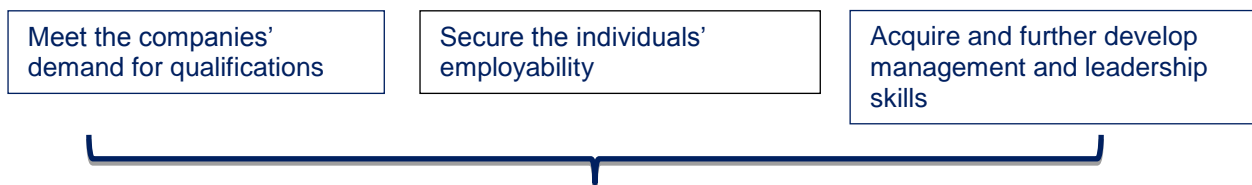
Phase 3 – Evaluation: In this phase, the contents of a qualification are subjected to a review. The goal is to examine whether the offered qualification fits precisely, i.e. to determine with various qualitative and quantitative methods whether the objectives linked with the qualification are actually reached. The evaluation should comprise all aspects of the programme, including the pedagogical and didactic concept, the learning, working and exam materials used, the educational staff, the examination procedure, the satisfaction of the learners, the satisfaction of the companies with the learning outcomes actually acquired, etc.

Phase 4 – Review: This phase is about adapting the qualification offer based on the evaluation results. The implementation of these results leads to renewed planning or a new orientation of the provided programmes.

Work steps to which the overall **twelve quality features** relate are allocated to each phase. These quality features are, in turn, derived from the three primary objectives of higher VET and form the basis of quality assurance in higher VET. The following diagram aims to illustrate the **structure** of the European Guidelines. Subsequently, each quality feature (QF) is described in detail.

Diagram 1: Structure of the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance of Higher VET

Meet the companies' demand for qualifications	Secure the individuals' employability	Acquire and further develop management and leadership skills

| Planning | Work step: Needs analysis | QF 1: A structured process for the identification of the demand for qualifications |
| | | QF 2: Analysis of the demand for qualifications by company representatives |

Implemen-tation	Work step: Development and modernisation of higher VET qualifications	QF 3: A structured process for developing or modernising qualifications
		QF 4: Steering of the development and modernisation process by business associations
		QF 5: Transparency in the presentation of qualifications
	Work step: Teaching the education content	QF 6: Orientation towards learners with professional experience
		QF 7: Securing a high labour market relevance of the provided qualifications
		QF 8: Qualified educational staff with experience from company-based practice
	Work step: Implementation of an assessment procedure	QF 9: A structured and transparent process for the assessment procedure
		QF 10: A valid assessment procedure with examiners from professional practice

| Evaluation | Work step: Examination of the offer | QF 11: A systematic process for the evaluation of the qualification offer |

| Review | Work step: Deduction of conclusions | QF 12: Identification of improvement measures as a result of the evaluation |

Phase 1: Planning

Work step: Analysis of the needs analysis

QF 1: A structured process for the identification of the demand for qualifications

> *As a rule, the companies themselves are the driving force behind the development of new and the modernisation of already established qualifications. This stimulus triggers a monitoring process controlled by business associations. In this process, the demand for qualifications among companies is identified in a structured manner. This safeguards the consistent demand-orientation of higher VET.*

Higher VET qualifications are characterised by their immediate proximity to the labour market. To guarantee this, the development of new qualifications and the adjustment of existing education and training programmes and qualifications should be preceded by comprehensive monitoring of qualification requirements in the companies. This guarantees alignment of the qualification offer and the demand for qualifications.

In principle, it is recommended that a monitoring process be launched that is controlled by professional and business associations and is characterised by a structured procedure adapted to the companies in order to identify their actual need for qualifications. Here, all relevant sources of information must be used that are available at the national and sectoral level and focus on the current – but especially on the future – qualification demand. The monitoring activities can comprise the evaluation of secondary statistics and relevant sectoral analyses (such as qualification needs studies) but they can also include the implementation of own surveys. Furthermore, attendance of conferences, sectoral days and other events can be useful for the monitoring work as they can also facilitate contacts with companies. This structured and comprehensive approach allows an early appraisal of qualification demands, which can then be considered appropriately in the development of qualification programmes.

Monitoring should be carried out at regular intervals, to be able to respond to the companies' qualification needs as quickly as possible and in a tailored manner.

QF 2: Analysis of the demand for qualifications by company representatives

> *In order to gear higher VET towards the companies' demand for qualifications, company representatives play a decisive role in the analysis of the monitoring results. Here, the existing qualification structure of a sector needs to be considered as well.*

The qualifications provided in higher VET should be geared towards the qualification requirements expressed by the companies or economic sectors. For this purpose it is necessary to involve representatives of business associations and other professional practitioners in all phases of this process. Their direct involvement in the evaluation and interpretation of the information gathered in the course of different monitoring activities (➜ QF 1) guarantees that higher VET qualifications are really developed 'from the economy, for the economy'.

When analysing the monitoring results, it is also necessary to take account of skills and qualifications already existing among the employees in the economic sectors. This ensures that the provided qualifications can focus more specifically on the companies' demand which is not yet met, or not sufficiently met, on the labour market.

As well as the demand side, the supply side needs to be considered too. Before taking specific steps for the implementation of a qualification (➔ Phase 2), it is recommended to analyse the existing qualification offer and assess if new programmes can be developed or existing ones adapted. It is additionally important to ensure that new or modernised programmes fit in with the qualification structure of the respective sector overall, i.e. they should build on existing programmes and qualifications or complement them sensibly ('career ladders') and facilitate transition to other qualifications ('permeability').

Phase 2: Implementation

Work step: Development and modernisation of higher VET qualifications

QF 3: A structured process for developing or modernising qualifications

The development of new and the adjustment of already existing qualifications to a changed professional practice follows structured and standardised procedures with participation of all relevant actors. This creates transparency and clarity for everyone involved in the qualification process.

The development and modernisation process of higher VET qualifications should follow a clearly structured procedure. Here it is necessary to ensure that all relevant actors, especially representatives of companies (➔ QF 4), of the governance process, of VET research as well as the educational staff and the examiners are involved. They should be informed of the process flow, so that a smooth flow and exchange of information is guaranteed.

It is additionally important that the functions and responsibilities of all those involved in the process are clearly defined.

At the beginning of this process (cf. Diagram 2), consideration should be given as to which tasks and activities the graduates should be qualified in and what room for manoeuvre and scope for decision-making they should have. The requirements from professional practice, which were surveyed and analysed as part of the planning phase, should be taken into account in these considerations.

Subsequently the qualification to be attained should be defined, i.e. which learning outcomes the graduates must be able to prove by the end of their programme. Here it is essential to include a clear reference to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its descriptors to guarantee transparency and comparability.

In another step, the learning process (if such a process is foreseen as mandatory) should be specified, i.e. the duration of the programme, its curricular contents, which didactic concept is applied, etc. In addition, it is necessary to define which access requirements the learners need to fulfil to complete the learning process and/or acquire the qualification. Furthermore it is necessary to describe in a transparent manner the final assessment procedure that makes it possible to determine and assess in a valid way the learning outcomes that are connected with the qualification. This includes the methodology, the instruments, the admission requirements (such as subject-specific employment), the specification of the assessment criteria and of the examiners.

Diagram 2: Procedure for the development and modernisation of a qualification

Procedure	Focus	Key questions	Relevance for QFs
Step 1	Considerations about the future graduates	– In which sectors/business areas/activity fields will the graduates work? – Which activities will they carry out? – What room for manoeuvre, leeway and scope for decision-making will they have?	QF 1, QF 2, QF 4
Step 2	Definition of the qualification	– What do the graduates have to know and be able to do by the end of the programme? — What degree of independence and responsibility will the graduates enjoy?	QF 5
Step 3	Conception of the learning process and assessment procedure	– What will be the duration of the course? When should the periods of instruction be offered? – What content will be taught? – Which didactic concept will be applied? – Which access requirements will be applied in the programme? – How are the learning outcomes identified? Which methods, instruments, parts of the procedure, etc. and which requirements for admission to the assessment procedure will be applied? — Which educational staff can be employed? etc.	QF 6, QF 7, QF 8, QF 9, QF 10

It is also essential that the development and modernisation process be based on the respective legal or regulatory framework. This applies especially to regulated professions.

QF 4: Steering of the development/modernisation process by business associations

The development/modernisation of higher VET qualifications is controlled to a substantial degree by professional and company associations. Their expert knowledge in this process ensures that the qualifications provided meet the companies' demand for qualifications precisely.

One major quality feature of higher VET qualifications is their direct applicability in the work and business processes of companies. This explains their high relevance for the labour market, which in turn results in clear added value for the individuals' employability. This is safeguarded by the direct involvement of representatives from companies and business associations in the development/modernisation of higher VET qualifications. These individuals should have comprehensive expert knowledge in the relevant economic sector/field of work and, where necessary, exert executive and staff management functions (such as the training of apprentices). It is also beneficial if they have gathered experience as trainers and/or examiners in higher VET as they can contribute this expert knowledge to the development/ modernisation process as well.

Professional practitioners provide crucial help in the transfer of the companies' needs for qualifications (➜ QF 1), which are the result of technological innovations for example, to specific qualification contents. In this way, a bridge is built between the labour market and the education sector – a distinctive feature of the higher VET sector. Direct involvement of professional practitioners in the process of the development, adjustment and implementation of higher VET qualifications – a process steered by the professional and business associations – is therefore absolutely essential.

QF 5: Transparency in the presentation of qualifications

A transparent presentation both of the internal processes at higher VET qualification providers and of the qualifications to the outside leads to more clarity and an enhancement of understanding. Transparency additionally strengthens trust in these education programmes and qualifications, which increases their acceptance and fosters permeability to other education sectors.

Higher VET qualifications should be presented in a transparent, clear and understandable form. This concerns, on the one hand, the internal processes at educational providers and certifying bodies. It is recommended that processes and procedures – such as regarding the selection of the education staff, the recording of the assessment procedure, possibilities of appeals/objections to the examination results, measures of examination/examiner monitoring, etc. – be set out and described in detail to ensure they are clear to all parties involved.

On the other hand, it is necessary to ensure transparency in the presentation of the qualifications to the outside. Here the description in the form of learning outcomes is essential. This aims to make the knowledge, skills and competences (in the sense of autonomy and respon-

sibility) associated with the qualifications visible. Furthermore it is recommended that the following details about the qualifications be added:

- the title of the qualification
- the NQF/EQF level
- the requirements and criteria for admission to the qualification programme
- the duration of the programme/course, where relevant
- rights acquired when obtaining the qualification
- the contents, duration, methods, procedures and instruments to determine and assess the acquired learning outcomes
- the access options and credit transfer options to other qualifications

The transparent presentation aims to clearly express the commitment of the qualification provider to meet the demands and reach the objectives connected with the qualification. In addition, it aims to ensure a high degree of acceptance is reached. Furthermore, a transparent presentation should promote the qualification's access options to other education sectors and its recognition in the national and international context.

Work step: Teaching the education content

QF 6: Orientation towards learners with professional experience

Higher VET qualification programmes are mainly targeted towards holders of subject-specific IVET qualifications and/or relevant professional practice. The offer therefore serves to deepen and expand existing subject-specific and interdisciplinary competences, on the one hand. On the other, it enables learners to assume decision-making and managerial responsibility.

Participants in qualification programmes offered in higher VET usually have a vocational qualification and/or several years of practical work experience. Frequently they are active in the respective specialist field while acquiring the higher VET qualification at the same time so that they can also contribute their varied professional experiences and subject-related expertise directly to the teaching process.

Therefore the teaching/learning process should be designed in a way that the existing specialist skills and the practical knowledge obtained by the learners is taken into account. One major objective of higher VET is that learners acquire subject-specific further qualifications to enable them to tackle different, even unforeseeable challenges in their professional practice. For that reason, attention should be paid in the programme/course not only to expanding specialist skills but also (and especially) to strengthening the soft skills that are required when faced with more complex tasks, such as problem-solving skills, the ability to deal with conflict, innovation capacity, customer orientation, etc. Major importance should also be attached to teaching managerial and leadership skills as, in practice, graduates frequently head work/project teams, organisational units or companies and therefore also assume responsibility for the staff in their areas.

It is not only the provided range of education programmes itself which should be geared towards learners with experience from practice but also any guidance and support provided in advance should be oriented towards these learners. In consultations the education and training providers should identify the educational objectives of interested learners and show them which specific qualification options they have. These advisory talks should also be used to ensure that the target group of the respective qualifications provided is as homogeneous as possible to gear the teaching process as well as possible towards existing skills and experiences.

QF 7: Securing a high labour market relevance of the provided qualifications

Graduates of higher VET are equipped with skills that can be applied directly on the labour market. This requires a clear focus on practical work when education content is taught. This is achieved in particular by maintaining close contacts with professional practice, which are established in varied ways.

Higher VET qualification programmes are aimed at the acquisition of professional skills, complemented by theoretical knowledge of the respective specialist field. The theoretical knowledge that is required and necessary for professional skills is taught based on practical work. The professional activity field is at the foreground rather than academic knowledge/the respective discipline. Therefore it is necessary to gear the teaching of learning content to the companies' work and business processes and thus create as many links as possible to professional practice. Not only should the learners contribute their practical experiences to the learning process (➔ QF 6); the teachers (➔ QF 8) and examiners (➔ QF 11) should also have company-based practical experience or come from practice.

The materials used in the course of the learning process should be oriented towards examples from practice and guarantee direct applicability at the place of work. Practice orientation can additionally be created by setting up contacts with companies, such as in company visits, lectures held by company representatives, 'fireside chats', discussion rounds, etc.

As part of the project work or final papers/thesis work, learners should work on real-life tasks for/in cooperation with companies. Where education and training programmes are not provided in tandem with practical work anyway, practice phases at companies can also be integrated into the educational offer. Here companies become important places of learning which contribute to strengthening and deepening the learners' professional competence.

QF 8: Qualified educational staff with experience from company-based practice

Learning/teaching processes in higher VET are carried out by people who not only have the required pedagogical and didactic competences but also practical job-specific and company-based experience. In this way it is possible to gear these processes towards current requirements and authentic situations.

The teaching staff are of vital importance in higher VET. Their expert knowledge contributes significantly to the quality of the teaching/learning processes. They should not only be qualified to work with mostly adult learners, but should also and above all have practical professional experience and up-to-date subject-specific expert knowledge which they can introduce directly into their teaching practice. Only teachers who know the reality of the business world can pass on this knowledge and experience to their learners. Depending on the specific educational objective, however, experts on subject-specific theory can be involved in the teaching/learning process.

In-depth practical know-how is also indispensable because, as a rule, the learners themselves have practical specialist skills (➜ QF 6) which they want to expand and deepen by attending a higher VET programme. Practical experience should therefore be a key criterion when selecting the teachers. In order to qualify professional practitioners also in a pedagogical and didactic respect, above all for teaching (mostly) adult learners, attendance of related CET programmes should be foreseen.

But orientation towards real-life situations is important not only for the teaching/learning processes – the learning materials, project work and other work instructions also have to be geared towards practice (➜ QF 7). It is only through a close link with practice that teaching can be oriented towards the companies' needs.

Work step: Implementation of an assessment procedure

QF 9: A structured and transparent process for the assessment procedure

The awarding of qualifications is based on a structured and transparent assessment procedure. Standardised processes, an open information policy and integration into a business-oriented governance structure create clarity and enhance trust in the attained qualification.

The assessment procedure, i.e. the process which has to be carried out to acquire the higher VET qualification, should follow a precise structure that is clearly communicated to the outside. For this it is necessary to present in a transparent manner which methods, instruments and procedures are used to check the attainment of the learning outcomes laid down in the implementation phase (➜ Phase 2) as well as which assessment criteria are applied in this process and how the results are documented. This information should be presented in a way that others, especially learners, but also 'successor institutions' (i.e. companies or advanced educational establishments where higher VET graduates are admitted) can understand it.

Additionally, it is essential to lay down the responsibilities of everyone involved in the assessment procedure. A continual exchange of information should be established between all those who are involved in the qualification process (such as between teachers and examiners). In this way it is possible to match the tasks fulfilled and the steps taken by those involved better with the materials, such as manuals, work tasks, exam catalogues, and similar, which are used throughout the process.

Clearly laid-down structures, an open communication flow and integration into a business-oriented governance structure contribute substantially to improving understanding of the qualification and thus strengthening trust in it and its credibility.

QF 10: A valid assessment procedure with examiners from professional practice

The assessment procedure is to be organised in such a way that the learning outcomes connected with the qualification can be proven in an objective and valid way. An essential aspect here is the involvement of professional practitioners from the companies who can contribute their specialist competences in the course of the procedure. It is also important to distinguish between teaching and examining tasks. Here the principle applies: those who teach do not examine.

The methods and instruments applied in the assessment and examination procedure should be selected in a way that they lead to valid and objectively understandable results. A high degree of practice orientation of the tasks used in them can be achieved by gearing them towards situations at work which might really occur (such as customer orders, specific problems arising in the implementation of projects, challenges created by legal changes or changes of staff, etc.). This practice orientation should mainly be ensured by involving professional practitioners from companies who can contribute their specialist expertise and practical experience to the entire exam process, such as for creating exam assignments or holding expert talks. In addition, practitioners are able to assess the professional competence of the candidates, i.e. assess whether they have actually reached the objectives/requirements connected with the qualification and whether they can apply them in practice.

As well as in-depth subject-specific expert knowledge, examiners should also have exam-specific and teaching-related skills. It is therefore recommended to offer relevant training programmes and materials (such as examiners' manuals) and ensure that they regularly take part in CVET programmes.

In principle, assessment procedures in higher VET should have the character of external evaluations. Therefore the responsibility for the assessment and appraisal of learners should not be part of the teachers' sphere of competence but be transferred to separate independent bodies. This separation prevents any possible conflict of interest and achieves a high degree of objectiveness and validity.

Phase 3: Evaluation

<u>Work step: Examination of the offer</u>

QF 11: A systematic process for the evaluation of the qualification offer

> *To maintain and improve the quality of qualification offers it is necessary to evaluate them at regular intervals and as part of a systematic process. The basis for this evaluation is formed by data and feedback from graduates, employers and all those involved in the planning and implementation of qualifications.*

The qualification offer should regularly be subjected to a quality check to identify any required changes and be able to make adjustments if necessary. It is recommended to define a systematic process for this evaluation to collect feedback – in the form of both quantitative data and qualitative information – as comprehensively as possible.

It is important for all relevant actors in the planning and implementation phase of a qualification to be involved in the evaluation. These people should hold regular exchanges about the qualification offer – not only to identify improvement potential but also to guarantee a uniform and coordinated procedure.

One aspect which is gaining in importance for the evaluation is to collect feedback from the graduates – not only immediately after they have acquired the qualification (for instance to obtain feedback about their satisfaction with the training contents, the teachers, the examiners, etc.), but also some time afterwards, to subject the qualification requirements and objectives of the qualification provider (➔ QF 5) to a reality check. These should mainly be determined based on the impact of the qualification for the companies on the labour market (such as by the type of activities pursued by holders of the qualification based on their graduation, by the development of their income situation, their decision-making powers, their management and executive functions, etc.).

In addition, the companies should be questioned about how precisely the qualification offer meets their requirements and if they possibly have any requests for changing it. The feedback from the companies also serves to determine whether the expectations which the provider has in connection with their qualifications are actually met in practice, i.e. if the graduates are employed in line with their qualification in the companies, if the desired effects happen (e.g. promotion to an executive position) and if this enhances the staff's employability.

Phase 4: Review

<u>Work step: Deduction of conclusions</u>

QF 12: Identification of improvement measures as a result of the evaluation

The analysis of the information gathered in the course of the evaluation allows conclusions to be drawn for improving the qualification offer. These conclusions are included in the adjustment of the qualification offer and thus safeguard its quality.

The quantitative and qualitative information collected in the course of the evaluation should be analysed and discussed in the bodies responsible for the qualification. In addition, conclusions should be drawn from it about the work steps required to improve and modernise the qualification offer.

Abstract

By way of summary, three key points can be derived from the **twelve quality features**. These points are at the core of quality assurance in higher VET:

1. **Ensuring proximity to the labour market**: Higher VET is demand-driven. One characteristic of the quality of higher VET is the involvement of representatives from professional practice in the entire 'lifecycle' of a qualification – from the needs analysis to the implementation of measures aiming to improve the qualifications on offer.

2. **Governance structure with close ties to the economy**: The close connection between companies and higher VET is also reflected in the governance structure. This is characterised by the institutional cooperation of organisations with close ties to the economy, such as chambers, professional associations and – depending on the context – social partners as well as responsible state authorities and ministries. This ensures that higher VET is geared towards the specific requirements of the companies and the labour market, both conceptually and in practical implementation ('qualifications from the economy, for the economy').

3. **Safeguarding transparency**: Transparency creates awareness, awareness strengthens trust, trust leads to appreciation and recognition. To safeguard transparency it is important to structure all the processes and procedures throughout the 'lifecycle' of a qualification and communicate information clearly.

4. European Network on Quality Assurance in Higher Vocational Education and Training

The **European Network on Quality Assurance in Higher Vocational Education and Training**, which is coordinated by UEAPME, was set up in May 2017. Initially, its target group is stakeholder organisations which are organised in the UEAPME Training Committee; it is planned that interested organisations and institutions outside of this committee can also become members of the Network in the future.

It is the **goal** of this Network to

- promote the topic of higher VET, especially the aspect of quality assurance in higher VET, at the European and national level,
- contribute expert knowledge on higher VET, particularly regarding quality assurance in higher VET, to related discussion processes at the European and national level,
- further develop the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET,
- encourage the application and implementation of the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET,
- participate in the exchange and transfer of expert knowledge, experience and best practice examples in higher VET, especially regarding quality assurance in higher VET, inside and outside the Network, such as by participation in events or the dissemination of information.

It is **expected** of the Network members that they

- contribute their expert knowledge of different aspects of higher VET, especially aspects of quality assurance in higher VET,
- take part in discussions about higher VET, especially regarding quality assurance in higher VET,
- share information, knowledge and expertise with other members of the Network,
- implement the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET and encourage their implementation,
- contribute to the further development of the European Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher VET.

To become a member of the European Network on Quality Assurance in Higher Vocational Education and Training, it is necessary to fill in a **Declaration of Interest**. The relevant form is available for download at the QA HiVETnet website: https://www.ibw.at/bibliothek/id/356/.

Overview of the quality features of higher VET

QA phases/ 'lifecycle' of a qualification	Work steps	Quality features (QF)	Key recommendation
Planning	Needs analysis	QF 1: A structured process for the identification of the demand for qualifications	As a rule, the companies themselves are the driving force behind the development of new and the modernisation of already established qualifications. This stimulus triggers a monitoring process controlled by business associations. In this process, the demand for qualifications among companies is identified in a structured manner. This safeguards the consistent demand-orientation of higher VET.
		QF 2: Analysis of the demand for qualifications by company representatives	In order to gear higher VET towards the companies' demand for qualifications, company representatives play a decisive role in the analysis of the monitoring results. Here, the existing qualification structure of a sector needs to be considered as well.
Implementation	Development and modernisation of higher VET qualifications	QF 3: A structured process for developing/modernising qualifications	The development of new and the adjustment of already existing qualifications to a changed professional practice follows structured and standardised procedures with participation of all relevant actors. This creates transparency and clarity for everyone involved in the qualification process.
		QF 4: Steering of the development/ modernisation process by business associations	The development/modernisation of higher VET qualifications is controlled to a substantial degree by professional and company associations. Their expert knowledge in this process ensures that the qualifications provided meet the companies' demand for qualifications precisely.

QA phases/ 'lifecycle' of a qualification	Work steps	Quality features (QF)	Key recommendation
Implementation	Development/ modernisation of high-er VET qualifications	QF 5: Transparency in the presentation of qualifications	A transparent presentation both of the internal processes at higher VET qualification providers and of the qualifications to the outside leads to more clarity and an enhancement of understanding. Transparency additionally strengthens trust in these education programmes and qualifications, which increases their acceptance and fosters permeability to other education sectors.
	Teaching the education content	QF 6: Orientation towards learners with professional experience	Higher VET qualification programmes are mainly targeted towards holders of subject-specific IVET qualifications and/or relevant professional practice. The offer therefore serves to deepen and expand existing subject-specific and interdisciplinary competences, on the one hand. On the other, it enables learners to assume decision-making and managerial responsibility.
		QF 7: Securing a high labour market relevance of the provided qualifications	Graduates of higher VET are equipped with skills which can be applied directly on the labour market. This requires a clear focus on practice and practical work when related education content is taught. This is achieved in particular by maintaining close contacts with professional practice, which are established in varied ways.
		QF 8: Qualified educational staff with experience from company-based practice	Learning/teaching processes in higher VET are carried out by people who not only have the required pedagogical and didactic competences but also practical job-specific and company-based experience. In this way it is possible to gear these processes towards current requirements and authentic situations.

QA phases/ 'lifecycle' of a qualification	Work steps	Quality features (QF)	Key recommendation
Implementation	Implementation of an assessment procedure	QF 9: A structured and transparent process for the assessment procedure	The awarding of qualifications is based on a structured and transparent assessment procedure. Standardised processes, an open information policy and integration into a business-oriented governance structure create clarity and enhance trust in the attained qualification.
		QF 10: A valid assessment procedure with examiners from professional practice	The assessment procedure is to be organised in a way that the learning outcomes connected with the qualification can be proven in an objective and valid way. An essential aspect here is the involvement of professional practitioners from the companies who can contribute their specialist competences and professional experiences in the course of the procedure. It is also important to distinguish between teaching and examining tasks. Here the principle applies: those who teach do not examine.
Evaluation	Examination of the offer	QF 11: A systematic process for the evaluation of the qualification offer	To maintain and improve the quality of qualification offers it is necessary to evaluate them at regular intervals and as part of a systematic process. The basis for this evaluation is formed by data and feedback from graduates, employers and all people involved in the planning and implementation of qualifications.
Review	Deduction of conclusions	QF 12: Identification of improvement measures as a result of the evaluation	The analysis of the information gathered in the course of the evaluation allows conclusions to be drawn for improving the qualification offer. These conclusions are included in the adjustment of the qualification offer and thus safeguard its quality.

Literature and links

Introduction

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Quality Assurance

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